

Gospel and Community Church of Joy [CCOJ], Part 2

Colleagues,

Last week's posting on the topic above drew the most response ever for ThTh. Seven percent of our (admittedly not too huge) listserve-receivers wrote back. Here are a few of them. Some of you asked for more particulars on the CCOJ sermon. I'll reprint the sermon outline page with fill-in-the-blanks in the worship folder: [Bracketed info thereafter from me indicates preacher's words for filling in the blanks, plus other items from my notes.]

Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

March 16, 2003

Message by Pastor Walt Kallestad

Psalm 13:1-6

"Battling the Enemies of Joy"

*I. THE BANDIT OF JOY – _____'s
story*

*[Black Bart, notorious Wells Fargo bandit of 1835 who
terrorized stage-coach travellers]*

II. ENEMIES OF JOY

*1. _____ "Oh Lord, how long will you
forget me? Forever?"*

[Forgetfulness]

2. _____ "How long must I struggle with

anguish in my soul, with sorrow in my heart everyday?"

[Sorrow]

3. _____ "Turn and answer me, Oh Lord my God! Restore the light to my eyes or I will die!"

[Darkness]

III. THE BEAUTY OF JOY – _____'s story

[Young woman whose lying to her parents ended in a near-death disaster. How did she survive? "Prayer. God. You guys here at CCOJ. God there for me. My trust in God."]

IV. FRIENDS OF JOY

1. _____ "I trust in your unfailing love."

[Trust in God]

2. _____ "I will rejoice because you have rescued me."

[Rejoice. Story of Robert Reed who led 70 people to Christ.]

3. _____ "I will sing to the Lord because He has been good to me."

[Singing. Illustrated with Beverly Sills' story: "Because God is my Savior, I have decided to live with joy."]

[Conclusion: Jesus Christ was mentioned (but no cross and resurrection) as we were exhorted to move from timid joy-less hearts to "the heart of a champion," since "the heart of a champion allows Jesus Christ to come into your heart."]

READER RESPONSE TO ThTh 255

1. A Petroleum Cyber-Scientist in Colorado:

CCOJ IS SELF-REPLICATING, IN OUR CONGREGATION TOO. Your latest Thursday Theology did prompt an immediate response, primarily because we are currently struggling

with Community of Joy ideology in our own congregation. You were much too kind to Kallestad et al. The problem is not primarily the message proclaimed on March 16 (or any other Sunday for that matter) at the Community of Joy.

The primary problem is that the Community of Joy is vigorously promoting what they do as the model for the church of the 21st century. They offer an extensive series of seminars and classes for pastors and lay leaders to promulgate this model and take it back to their own congregations. (Which may explain Pastor Kallestad's somewhat rote reply to you: you were not only critiquing his performance as a pastor, you implicitly posed a threat to what I'm sure is a pretty lucrative franchise, bringing in revenues in at least the six figures annually.)

I view these seminars somewhat akin to the temptation of Jesus at the beginning of his ministry. I presume Pr. Kallestad takes the visiting pastors to some high point on the Community of Joy "campus" and asserts that they could have this too, if only they take a few more of the programs Community of Joy offers. Unfortunately all too many of our pastors have neither the relationship to the Father nor the knowledge of scripture that Jesus employed against Satan.

Anyway, I offer these musings to you as a former seminary professor to reflect on the dominance of Community of Joy type programs for the continuing education of our pastors (I would refer to it more as their seduction), particularly when the Community of Joy cannot even get the Gospel right themselves.

On that cheery note, peace.

2. *Someone Unknown to Me:*

KUDOS Greatly appreciated your commentary on the worship experience and the gospel. I needed that for my own thinking.

Applaud the Socrates-like response you took to the situation. Thanks for waking up my own reflective skills on what goes across my pulpit – what theology and gospel goes forth, what the people have to go forth on.

3. *Another Person Unknown to Me*

REPRIMANDI would like to make a couple of comments about your worship experience in Arizona, briefly...As to the accuracy of your observations about the sermon and worship service, you may be right on target (speaking the truth). But as you ripped these brothers to shreds, even as you claimed to have a pastoral concern on their behalf, I saw little or no evidence of love in your tone.

When a worship experience involves thousands of people, each at a different place in the journey of faith, the likelihood of being right on target personally is small—about like the odds of a fly ball to left field being hit directly into the fielder's glove without any movement necessary. In your case their style is so far removed from your hermeneutical frame of reference that without a great deal of hustle you would have difficulty fielding the ball on the first bounce.

Perhaps Christ might become visible to eyes that explain a brother's actions (and proclamation) in the kindest way. And, if a pagan who doesn't even know God can serve as his anointed, how much more might one ordained in his name become Christ to those around him—even if his verbage seems incongruent with our understanding of the

words of the Word made flesh. Peace.

4. An ELCA pastor in Oregon

*A GROWING PROBLEM*Wow! I just read your exchange with Walt K. and I commend you in your effort to confront a growing problem in our church today: what is the gospel we preach? Clearly, and I have been to Community of Joy, the Gospel is being preached or a gospel is being preached in a manner that is no longer acceptable in the church today. A few years back the Community of Joy offered a seminar, and unfortunately I cannot remember the title, which, in essence proclaimed that the church must conform to the culture. Both [x] and I bristled at the title as well as the intended content. We are in the world, but not of the world. Yet Walt, especially in his lack of response to your 2nd letter, is not willing to engage in the type of conversation the so-called Church-Growth Movement desperately needs.

5. A Southern "Lady" and ThTh fan—most of the time

*SUCH A LICKIN' IN PUBLIC*I thought you might have just taken those boys to the woodshed and not given them such a lickin' in public. I read your postings religiously. (dreadful pun!!, but irresistible). You always keep that focus square on the Good News and don't let us get sidetracked. Generally I agree and especially enjoy hearing what Christians around the world are dealing with. The posts from Jerusalem were very disturbing. But disturbing in a good way. Thought-provoking way. I will wait with bated breath to see how the boys from Joy Church take their lickin'.

Now here is the Armchair Theologian take on all this: Some say that "if they aren't against us, they are for us," but I think these non-'crucified-risen-Christ'

talkers who claim the name of Christ are far more destructive than the Feng Shui-ers, or Wiccans, or other high profile non-christian groups. As I read your exchanges I was pounding my Armchair and saying yeah, yeah- that's just what I would have written if I had been a Real Lutheran Theologian.

6. An ELCA Pastor in Georgia.

I'VE WANTED TO WRITE SUCH A RESPONSEI commend (and thank) you for your response/s to the CCOJ crowd. I have wanted to write such a response (based on reading of articles and books & CCOJ lit.) for years but didn't feel that it would come off right. Your response was right on and I am so grateful to you for doing it. I am sorry that Walt took it personally. No need to have done that. It could have been a good discussion. But you see, Ed, your giving them/him the benefit of the doubt was probably much too generous. I see a lot of what goes on at CCOJ as opportunism, manipulation and ego-building (primarily for those running the show).

7. Theology Prof at a Lutheran University

THEOLOGICAL CURMUDGEONRY APPROVEDWhile you may have outdone yourself in theological curmudgeonry, the resolute way in which you have tried to keep Walt Kallestad's feet in the fire about the nature of the gospel is exactly on target. Every other debate or argument I've seen or heard about with WK has been about style and liturgy and music, and not about the substance of the "gospel" actually proclaimed and/or enacted [sacramentally] – if I can keep on taking Augsburg Confession VII literally). What your debate with WK accomplishes is to (try to) keep secondary matters secondary, and to focus on the gospel said and done in that assembly. And it is on that (sola?) that AC VII

rests its defining of any assembly as "church." [Info note: AC 7 says that what turns any group of people into "church" is when THE Gospel is preached in their midst, and the sacraments are administered among them in congruence with THAT Gospel.]

8. ELCA Pastor in Wisconsin

LIVES ARE CHANGED Great job of sniffing out his justification, "lives are changed" and coming straight back with the challenge, Muslim Imams' and Jewish rabbis' sermons also change lives (not to mention plain old motivation speakers, who probably have a better batting average than any of us sermon-givers, gospel-preachers included) but if the Gospel is not the means to the change (and WK conspicuously did NOT say "You caught me on an off week, usually the cross is at the center of what I teach") then is it really the change the Holy Spirit engineers, or something far less salutary (as in Acts 4:12)?

9. A Filipino Lutheran Pastor

TOUCHE' ON "REPRESENTS" I have heard sermons like the ones delivered by Walt and Tim and personal testimonies given by that woman. They are entertaining especially if the speaker (s) are good. However, we are called to preach the Good News not just any news no matter how good. We are not called to entertain people. I bet you there was not much real law either. Perhaps, Walt and Tim felt that there is already too much gospel in the hymns and in the liturgy. We thank God that it is there but our mandate is to proclaim the Gospel. As a Filipino we would not make public the kind of letter you wrote. We would rather write a private letter to both of the men.

The bread and wine do not represent the body and blood of Christ. Our forgiveness through this sacrament is not a symbol or representation of Christ's forgiveness for us.

It's real forgiveness. But I can't fault Walt and Tim for using the word, "represent." Isn't the ELCA in "full" communion with the United Church of Christ and the Reformed Church?

On another note, I wonder why preachers that preach a diluted law and Gospel gain a lot more hearers than those who proclaim the law in all its severity and the Gospel in all its sweetness?

This reminds me of a funny thing. I had a student [when I was a seminary prof] by the name of Fermin Satan. He became a Lutheran by taking the course Fundamentals of the Christian Faith offered by the Lutheran Hour. He gathered his friends and relatives and taught them what Lutheran Christians believe. Then the group asked for a missionary. When the missionary visited this mountain village, he found a ready congregation. After several weeks of visit the missionary confirmed Fermin Satan and all those whom he taught. Our Lutheran newspaper headlined the event thus, "Satan Now A Lutheran." Then Fermin went to the seminary. A few months before graduation he went to court and asked that his last name be changed to Capangpangan. He said he doesn't want to introduce himself as "Pastor Satan." His seminary classmates tried hard to dissuade him from changing his last name. Their reason: Satan can win more followers. Is the road to perdition really wider than the road to heaven? This is a true story. Fermin is now retired and back in his mountain village. Keep preaching the Gospel.

10. ELCA Pastor in Montana

BRAVO! I find myself becoming weary of the baseless joy "laughtrack" that is junk food passed off as meaty Gospel! The seminars colleagues attend in Phoenix bring

them back charged up for growth in their congregations, but I have yet to see the sustained growth that is fueled by the Gospel of Christ Crucified and Risen. I'm forwarding your correspondence with Walt to several in our neck of the tundra. I'll let you know what, if any, response I receive from them.

11. LCMS Pastor in Nebraska

SWALLOWING A CAMEL Thank you!! "Church growth" and "megachurch" preaching, a la Community of Joy, not to mention all the other kinds of "other gospel" preaching out there (not that there IS an other gospel!), has been plaguing the church for some time, actually for 2K years. I'm thankful for your parsing, and you did it more charitably than I would have. We've got one of these kinds of churches in our metro area, and it concerns me no end what they're feeding people. What galls me is how our district (and synod) seems to swallow such a camel, and harp on people's gnats. Jerome Burce is right—good preaching (Gospel preaching) is the antidote. But few there be who are willing to dance that jig.

We get all kinds of mailings from CCoJ, and other parishes of their ilk, offering all kinds of "help" to us clueless folk who've been diagnosing and prognosing with the crucified/risen Christ all our ministry. To paraphrase a saint from early Acts, I say to them, "You and your help can go to hell." Pax et Gaudium.

12. A Methodist pastor in Phoenix. She was once a Crossings Student in St Louis.

A BETTER OFFER HAD YOU COME TO OUR CHURCH Ed, You should have visited our church (UMC, but Christian, nonetheless) on that Sunday instead of going to "Community of Joy." When our pastors serve communion, they don't mince words.

They say "This IS my body!" Peace and Joy.

13. An ELCA Bishop

YOU ARE KIND OF CROTCHETY AT TIMES! Thanks for the exchange between you and Walt Kallestad—though you are kind of crotchety at times! What I really appreciate is the clear formation in the Gospel. I know I don't always get it right when I preach or teach or write and I am probably my own worst critic. But I know it when I hear it, and I miss it when I don't! I am thankful my own pastor, (X), is an excellent preacher, well-grounded and not ashamed of proclaiming the Gospel.

14. A Luth. Pastor in Melbourne, Australia

THANKS FOR THE REMINDER Dear Brother Ed, From this humble Lutheran pastor in Melbourne's western suburbs, thank you for reminding me of what I can never be reminded too much of in your TT 255. Blessings & Shalom

15. A Retired LCMS Pastor in Virginia

EXEMPLARY CONGREGATIONS I was joyful over your response to the pastors of the Community of Joy in Phoenix. I thought your comments were most appropriate. In fact, you overwhelmed me with your direct, Scriptural critique of the sermon.

What bothers me is how a congregation can grow to have 12,000 members IF THIS IS A TYPICAL EXAMPLE OF THE THEOLOGY PROCLAIMED AT THAT PLACE. (Like you, I realize it is perhaps wrong to judge a pastor on the basis of only one sermon.) On second thought, I do know how that is possible: the theology of glory appeals to the natural man.

But the situation becomes more complicated when you realize that the Community of Joy seems to be one of the exemplary congregations of the ELCA. We have the same problem in the LCMS. The congregation to which I used to

belong is now a "poster "congregation of the LCMS Southeastern District, if not of the whole LCMS. The pastor is sold on the church growth movement. And, like the Community of Joy, people are coming to it in droves. It is difficult to argue with numerical success.

It seems our contemporary god is "growth," not "faithfulness." Thank you for being faithful to the tradition passed down to us.